

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
Spring 2017 Volume XXII, Issue 1



North American Beaver keeping busy in the river
Photo by Carson and Jim Clark

The North American Beaver

Castor Canadensis By Sharon Plummer

Not many mammals have a National and International Day named in their honor, but Beavers hold that trophy, due to their amazing adaptations, exceptional engineering skills and their immense impact on our landscape.

The tools they possess include translucent eyelids to see underwater and self-sharpening, razor-edged teeth that never stop growing. Their teeth are reinforced with iron, giving them an orange tone. Those teeth can cut down a small tree in a matter of minutes. Their sleek flat tail serves as a rudder to skillfully steer them through the waters to build dams across streams and rivers. Their webbed feet give them the power to swim and easily construct complex lodges on or beside the ponds they have created.

With all of these assets, you can see why they can play such an important role in our ecosystem for both humans and other creatures. The ponds they create become a fountain of life, with insects, fish, amphibians all bubbling with activity, alongside deer, fox and waterfowl, which will now come to this watering hole.



Beaver and its offspring
Photo by Carson and Jim Clark

Beaver dams reduce the impact of flash flooding because they hold back the debris and sediment, helping preserve the floodplain. They build lodges on or beside their ponds out of sticks and mud. They will raise their family in these lodges that have two rooms, one "mudroom" for drying off and then the main den. Beavers are in the rodent family, with sizes averaging from 30 to 70 lbs. because they never stop growing. They mate for life and can live up to about 29 years in the wild. Many people think that beavers eat fish, but they are strict herbivores, preferring the bark of birch, cherry, and maple trees, as well as water lilies and other aquatic plants.

Beavers are believed to inhabit almost every county in Virginia. In Loudoun County, you can search for them at the Dulles Wetlands or Banshee Reeks, though they do most of their busy work at night. We are so lucky to still have these unique and talented creatures among us contributing to our ever-evolving landscape.

Resources

- <http://www.loudounwildlife.org/HHBeaversComeback.htm>
- <http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/animals/beaver.html>
- <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/nuisance/beaver/>

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Executive Director's Message

by Nicole Hamilton

Our county's comprehensive plan is the guiding document that lays out the vision and policies for Loudoun in terms of what we value and want in and for our communities looking forward. Through it, we define how we will protect and preserve our natural habitat . . . or not.

The county is using a 5-phase process to develop our next comprehensive plan. They completed the "Foundations" phase, which is an assessment of trend data and public input. This information is being used to develop vision statements and goals for the new comprehensive plan.

What concerns us is that while vision statements and goals are good, they do not have the teeth, the metrics and the specific details that we as citizens need to hold our county accountable for protecting habitat into the future. Broad statements are easily interpreted in a variety of ways and without metrics and specific policies that support implementation of those metrics, we will not be able to form positions to defend our natural habitat when development pressures push in on us further.

This summer, the county will unveil its vision statements, goals and objectives and the public will have a chance to weigh in again on what we want our plan to have in it. As we await this opportunity, please read through the documents being developed by the county and let us know your thoughts.

The "Foundations" report can be found here: <https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/126171>

A sample comprehensive plan which the county is using as its model, and which we feel is too high level to enable environmental protections, can be found here: http://www.suffolkva.us/files/6414/2971/1665/SUFFOLK_COMP_PLAN_-_FINAL_4-8-15sm2.pdf

And the public input from last fall's Envision Loudoun sessions can be found here in Appendix 4 (see what your neighbors and friends are saying is important): http://loudoun.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=69&event_id=1423&meta_id=114247

Our existing Green Infrastructure Policy, which could be thrown out via this new comprehensive plan, can be found here - see Chapter 5: <https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1017>

Throughout this process, it is critical for all of us to speak up for protecting and preserving our natural habitats. We need to retain the Green Infrastructure Policy that is in our existing comprehensive plan and strengthen it with metrics that will define success. If there is anything that we are advocating for, it is this.



Nicole Hamilton

Managing Editor: Sharon Plummer

Lead Editor: Steve Allen

Contributing Editors: Karen Coleman, Emily Cook, Mary Ann Good, Cyndi McCrea, Dan Sill

Proofreaders: Joe Coleman, Tracy Albert, Jill Miller, Kelly Senser

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The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) group of volunteers who share a common goal of protecting and perpetuating natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets quarterly. Board meetings are open to all current members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Nicole Hamilton.

OFFICE INFORMATION

Please check www.loudounwildlife.org for hours.

Phone: 703-777-2575.

Address:

Carriage Museum, Morven Park
17195 Southern Planter Lane
Suite 100
Leesburg, VA 20176

Mailing address:
PO Box 1892
Leesburg, VA 20177

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703-777-2575

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540-554-2542

540-554-2542

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

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703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-505-7001

703-777-2575

703-727-5555

703-777-2575

301-694-5628

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org

jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org

jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org

bbrown@loudounwildlife.org

pparis@loudounwildlife.org

hcutshall@loudounwildlife.org

jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org

jmiller@loudounwildlife.org

ppaschall@loudounwildlife.org

ssteadman@loudounwildlife.org

nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org

agarvey@loudounwildlife.org

jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org

ketten@loudounwildlife.org

aellis@loudounwildlife.org

cconca@loudounwildlife.org

splummer@loudounwildlife.org

nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org

jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org

ssteadman@loudounwildlife.org

sligi@loudounwildlife.org

jmiller@loudounwildlife.org

ksenser@loudounwildlife.org

corians@loudounwildlife.org



Beavers and Humans

By Dr. John Hadidian

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) fur provided an important economic foundation for the European colonization of North America. To their great misfortune, this semi-aquatic mammal's dense underfur happened to be ideally suited for the type of gentlemen's hats favored throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The tremendous industry in pelts underwrote the rise of the first great global corporation, the Hudson Bay Company, as well as substantial French and later American enterprises, such as John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company.

The loss of millions of beaver challenges traditional thinking about what the North American landscape might have looked like. The great forests of the Northeast were almost certainly more complex mosaics, with beaver ponds found along most streams, shrubs more than trees following riparian corridors, and large clearings ("beaver meadows") dotting the land where ponds had been abandoned and drained. Traces of the presence of beaver persisted long after they were gone. Louis Henry Morgan described an enormous series of dams, lodges and canals along the railroad as it pushed west through Ohio--archaeological remains of animals no longer there.

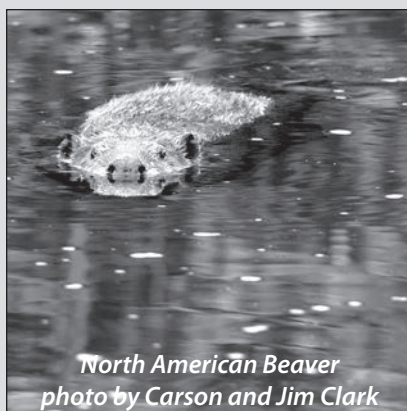
What that loss meant for other species of wildlife we can only guess. We do know that beaver wetlands today are biodiversity hot spots, and it is quite possible that we had losses, especially of insects and aquatic invertebrates, that have simply gone unrecorded. Contemporary research does show that beyond preserving biodiversity, many other environmental benefits come with having beaver on the landscape, including water storage and banking, sediment and pollutant filtering, and flood control among others. These benefits could be truly significant if enough beaver were allowed to recolonize places from which they were long ago extirpated, but we still seem to focus more on the conflicts and costs sometimes associated with the return of beaver than the good that recolonization could bring.

The conflicts beaver cause stem largely from our having occupied the floodplains they once commanded. Their impoundments may compromise sewer systems placed along stream drainages, or sometimes flood railroads, farmlands, roads and even residences. Equally concerning can be the downing of trees along streams or from yards accessible to beaver looking for building material. Such conflicts raise genuine concerns and may be especially challenging in suburban and urban areas, crowded enough as they are already. The traditional model of wildlife management is often applied when conflict occurs -- lethal removal, ideally by "harvesting" animals in the winter when pelts have commercial value. If that is not practical then beaver may be trapped as "nuisance" animals and/or efforts made to destroy dams and drain impoundments. This often means using backhoes or other heavy equipment to open dams, or in more remote areas dynamite. Both practices are wasteful, expensive and usually self-defeating, not to mention eliminating any of the benefits of having well-maintained beaver wetlands.

Fortunately, new, innovative and far-sighted approaches to managing conflicts with beaver have been developed and are gaining widespread acceptance as word about them continues to grow. What Skip Lisle, former wildlife biologist for the Penobscot Nation in Maine, calls flow devices have made controlling water levels in beaver impoundments both economical and effective. Basically of two general types, flow devices employ large corrugated pipes to move water over dams and stabilize water levels and/or "deceivers"--ingenious fencing designs that prevent damming in the first place. The result is consistent levels of water in impoundments that cannot tolerate variation or backup, leaving the resident beaver to either accept conditions as such or move on to look for more a favorable site. Skip's company has installed many dozens of these devices throughout the country and even ventured to Europe to demonstrate the technology there.



North American Beaver
photo by Carson and Jim Clark



North American Beaver
photo by Carson and Jim Clark



Beaver evidence
Photo by Brian Balik

■ Continued on page 4



■ *Beavers and Their Significance, continued*

And saving trees? Where desired, simple wire cages (not chicken wire, but heavier gauge material) can be used to prevent beaver damage, not to mention making great Scout projects.

A small piece of beaver arcana for those interested in such things can be taken from the pages of *In Beaver World* by Enos Mills. This work, first published in 1913, is a delightful description of these animals as he found them around what is today Rocky Mountain National Park (whose founding is often credited to Mills). Like J. Frank Dobie, who wrote about coyotes without the prejudices traditional of his time, Mills approached nature with unbounded enthusiasm, embracing wild animals simply for what they were, not for what uses people might make of them. His writings describe the Moraine Colony, located near today's Estes Park, which he followed and described over a period of almost three decades as dams were built, lodges raised and abandoned, and ponds shrank and grew. What makes this especially valuable (and interesting) is that another researcher followed it by adding another forty years of records to it, bringing the colony's history up to the late 1950s. I've spoken to Forest Service personnel who are pretty sure it can yet be found, but my brief searches so far have not been productive. Still, if you ever find yourself staying at the Estes Park YMCA, a short walk outside their property surely puts you close and in exactly the kind of terrain so favored by beaver in the past. You can also visit the Mills cabin, now a museum dedicated to this amazing early naturalist and interpreter of the natural world. Completing the nature tourism experience, just across the road and in sight of the cabin is an early Skip Lisle beaver deceiver that has been protecting that highway from flooding for about twenty years now. No hurry, too, as I think it might last for another twenty years at least.

It is obvious to me that as much as we have learned about beaver, we still have much to learn from them. Hopefully we can find engineering solutions to any conflicts nature's second best engineers might create, and work with this species to co-manage landscapes that benefit all.

Dr. John Hadidian is former Director of the Urban Wildlife Protection Program at The Humane Society of the United States and co-author of the book, Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife.

Resources

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- Justin P. Wright, Clive G. Jones & Alexander S. Flecker, An ecosystem engineer, the beaver, increases species richness at the landscape scale, *Oecologia* 132: 96-101 (2002).
- Jimmy D. Taylor & Russell D. Singleton, The evolution of flow devices used to reduce flooding by beavers: a review, *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 38(1):127-133 (2014).
- Skip Lisle. The use and potential of flow devices in beaver management, *Lutra* 46(2):211-216 (2003).
- Enos A. Mills, *In Beaver World* (University of Nebraska Press 1990).
- Don J. Neff, A seventy-year history of a Colorado beaver colony, *Journal of Mammalogy* 40(3):381 (1959).

The Story Behind the Beaver Photos

The stunning beaver photos in this edition are by Jim and Carson Clark, a father and son team. While expounding on Carson's interest in Beavers, they pursued capturing them on film and in writing. From their adventures, they created two children's books, seen through Carson's youthful view and camera lens.

Adventures of Buddy the Beaver

Buddy Explores the Pond

https://smile.amazon.com/Adventures-Buddy-Beaver-Explores-pond/dp/098211625X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1490742021&sr=81&keywords=buddy+beaver+book

Mystery of the Missing Friends

https://smile.amazon.com/Adventures-Buddy-Beaver-Mystery-Missing/dp/0984421882/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1490745082&sr=1-3

If you or your community are seeking to manage beaver conflicts, two commercial providers--Skip Lisle's company BeaverDeceivers (beaverdeceivers.com) and Mike Callahan's Beaver Solutions (beaversolutions.com)--provide abundant advice and resources. Groups such as the Beaver Advocacy Committee of the South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership in Oregon (stateofthebeaver.org), the "Worth a Dam" initiative in Martinez California (martinezbeavers.org), and Beavers, Wetlands and Wildlife in New York (beaversww.org) provide educational and informational resources and promote the value of having beaver on the landscape. --JH



Buddy and his dad
Photo by Carson and Jim Clark
www.jimclarkphoto.com



The Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count, December 28, 2016

by Joe Coleman, Compiler, Central Loudoun CBC

Overall, the results from the Central Loudoun CBC on Dec. 28 were on the low average side with 91 species and 28,337 individuals. While it was a great winter day to be outside, almost all of the teams, built from 110 participants, reported that the numbers of species and individuals were somewhat less than normal.

The highlights included finding a Common Yellowthroat (found on only one of our 19 previous counts), two Palm Warblers (found on only 3 previous counts), a Black-capped Chickadee (found on 4 of our previous counts), and a Common Goldeneye (5 previous counts).

Also interesting were the birds which reached their highest numbers in the 20-year history of the Central Loudoun CBC.

- 38 Bald Eagles – a heart-warming increase showing the success of the Endangered Species Act as none were found during the first 4 counts
- 650 Black Vultures – over the past century this species has steadily increased its range northwards into areas where it was once rare
- 571 Rock Pigeons.

The increase in both Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks over the last few years is also interesting. While both have been abundant in previous years, their combined total this year, 38, was much higher than any previous year.

It was nice to find a Merlin on this count (the 9th time we've found one). The 9 American Kestrels, while not as low as the last couple of years, reflect the overall decline of this species in the Mid-Atlantic. Though one year doesn't make a trend, perhaps the slight increase over the past few years reflects the many efforts citizens have begun to preserve this species before it tips over the edge the way Loggerhead Shrikes have, a species whose diet is very similar to that of the American

Kestrel. Interestingly enough, while both American Kestrels and Loggerhead Shrikes eat a lot of insects, Merlin diets are almost exclusively limited to small birds – one has to wonder if this might be a factor in the decline of the former two but not Merlins?

Another fascinating trend on this CBC is the increase of Chipping Sparrows, a species that used to migrate out of our area in the winter, and the decline in American Tree Sparrows, a species that used to migrate into our area in winter. While we found a high of 20 Chipping Sparrows this year, this was the second time in three years that we haven't found any American Tree Sparrows. While it's too early to tell what the reasons for this are, and though Central Loudoun is only one count, it may be that climate change is allowing species to remain further north than they used to.

While we've always found some Common Ravens on this count, the 21 Common Ravens found this year continue to show how extensively this species is now utilizing the Piedmont. And lastly, I'm sure the many bluebird box trails that Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy volunteers maintain are a factor behind the healthy number of Eastern Bluebirds, 593 on this count, which we find every year.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy thanks the many volunteers and staff who support and participate in the count and the many people and businesses that give us special access to their properties – without them this count wouldn't be nearly as successful!

If you're interested in seeing what we've found during our 20 years of counting, check out our website: http://loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/CBC_Summary_Years.pdf

Birdathon

Help raise money for birds in Loudoun County and have fun at the same time!

Be a Birdathoner

- Register on the website at <http://loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm>
- Encourage your friends, family, and neighbors to make a pledge
- Select a 24-hour count period between April 29 & May 14
- Conduct your count, singly or on a team, identifying as many species as possible within Loudoun County
- Follow up with your sponsors so their pledges come in by June 12

Be a Sponsor

- Want to support the Birdathon but don't have time for a day in the field? Make your own pledge!
- You can make a flat contribution to the Birdathon or make a per-species pledge to a team and challenge them!
- For more information visit our website at <http://loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm>

Loudoun Wildlife Call for Bluebird Monitors

LOCATIONS IN NEED

Take a purposeful stride back to nature and assist the Loudoun Wildlife Bluebird Monitoring Program. We have 52 public bluebird trails located in all parts of Loudoun County, along with many residential trails. Volunteers are needed for various aspects of bluebird stewardship activities.

Become a Bluebird Team Monitor on a Public Trail

Public bluebird trail monitoring occurs once a week, usually on the weekends, from late March to early September. These trails are designed such that it should only take 1 - 1.5 hrs of time per 10 nestboxes. If there is a team of monitors then the fewer times an individual has the opportunity to monitor. Often with a team, you may go out once a month. You may sign up to monitor for one or more trails.

Monitor your Home Bluebird Nestboxes

Register and monitor your home bluebird nestboxes (1 or more) with Loudoun Wildlife. Pledge to do weekly monitoring, report your end of season data, and to be vigilant against predation by house sparrows.

Assist with Bluebird Trail Work Projects

These are usually one time efforts. Work projects to be posted as needed. Some activities include: remounting, installing, and moving nestboxes on public trails; collection of nestbox GPS coordinates for the purposes of mapping our trails; and building new and refurbishing old and unmonitored bluebird nestboxes.

Donate Supplies to Benefit the Bluebird Program

(Full descriptions upon request)

Hardware supplies to build poles, baffles, and nestboxes. Monitoring Items: Home Depot buckets to carry gear, 1" 3-ring binder notebooks, 3-ring pencil pouches, 3-ring 10 Tab notebook dividers, 24" Telescoping Auto Inspection Mirrors, small flashlights, etc.

Loudoun Wildlife Bluebird Monitors are welcome to join a private Facebook group and connect with other monitors to learn more about our native cavity nesters, ask questions, and keep up with current activities on the trails. Invitation upon request and registration.

Register via the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Citizen Science Bluebird Monitoring website page.

Morven Park in Leesburg – needs trail lead and monitors
Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve in Leesburg – needs trail lead and monitors for new 10-box trail
Tuscarora High School in Leesburg – needs trail lead and monitors
Native Tree Walk at Ida Lee in Leesburg – needs a trail lead and monitors (easy paved path)
National Parks and Recreation Association in Ashburn – needs monitors (easy paved path)
Loudoun County Public Schools Administration Building in Ashburn – needs trail lead and monitors (rescue trail)
Franklin Park in Purcellville – needs monitors
Phillips Farm in Waterford – needs monitors
Loudoun Water - Aquia in Ashburn – needs monitors (easy paved path)
Bolen Park in Leesburg – needs monitors (usually by car, all nest boxes paired)
Willowsford Community in Ashburn – needs monitors (on paths)
Leesburg Senior Center in Leesburg – needs monitor
One Loudoun Park in Ashburn – needs monitors (easy paved path)
50 West Winery in Middleburg – needs monitors
Sunset Hills Winery in Purcellville – needs trail lead and monitors
Brambleton HOA Community in Ashburn – needs monitors
Lovettsville Community Park – needs monitors
Temple Hall Farm in Leesburg – needs 2 more teams of 1-2 monitors (22 nestbox trail)
Claude Moore Park in Sterling – needs 1 more team and possibly more
Algonkian Park in Sterling – welcomes more monitors
Briar Woods High School in Ashburn – welcomes more monitors
Crooked Run Orchard in Purcellville – possible monitors needed
Loudoun County High School in Leesburg – needs one monitor
Zephaniah Farm Vineyard in Leesburg – new trail that needs monitors
Catesby Farm in Middleburg – new trail that needs monitors



Bluebird
Photo by Jack Nevitt



Bluebird eggs
Photo by Karla Etten



Bluebird
Photo by Sharon Plummer



Celebrating Bird Migration



*Bird migration is arguably one of the greatest wonders of the world.
Join us in celebrating, learning and appreciating their feathered splendor.*

While bird migration occurs year-round, from late April through early June millions of birds make the journey north from their wintering grounds. While some of these stay and nest here, many will only stay in our area long enough to feed and replenish their strength before heading further north. As a result it is possible to observe over 100 species of birds in a single day. To celebrate this phenomenon the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is holding a number of bird walks at hotspots throughout the county as well as sponsoring a Birdathon between **April 29 and May 14** — the peak of migration in our area.

Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! — Loudoun Wildlife sponsors a series of walks in many of Loudoun's birdiest locations. Join us for one or more of the following walks. They all start at 8:00 a.m. unless otherwise noted. See program and events listing for details. **Registration required for all but Banshee Reeks: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Horsepen Preserve — Saturday, April 29

Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project — Wednesday, May 3, 7:00 a.m.

Goodstone Inn — Saturday, May 6

Camp Highroad — Wednesday, May 10

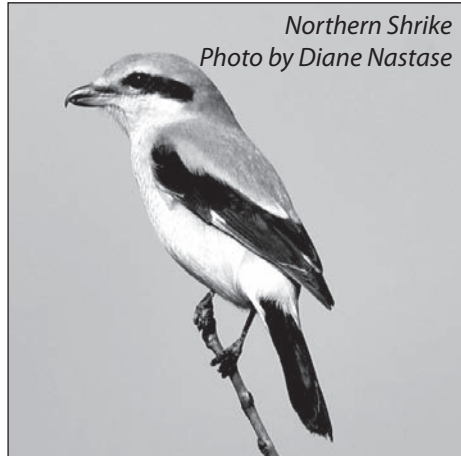
Banshee Reeks — Saturday, May 13

Claude Moore during the Birdiest Time of the Year: Meet Your Birds! — Saturday, May 13, 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Algonkian Regional Park — Sunday, May 14, 8:00 a.m.



Indigo Bunting
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Northern Shrike
Photo by Diane Nastase

*“Our task must be to free ourselves by widening
our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures
and the whole of nature and its beauty.”*

~Albert Einstein





Create the Habitat and the Animals Will Come

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Ambassador



When long-time Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy member Janet Locklear purchased her property a little over 10 years ago, she had an area of woodland, including some beautiful, mature, native trees, but also a large expanse of lawn, where in her words "there was no activity."

Janet had a passion for birds and had spent many years as the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Bluebird Coordinator, but a talk by Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home*, kick-started her appreciation for the vital role that we can all play in providing healthy habitat for wildlife in our own backyards, so she signed up for Audubon at Home.

Like many of us, she started out in a modest way, attending a Native Plant Sale and going home with Milkweed, Joe-Pye Weed, Asters, and Goldenrod, all of which are key perennials for supporting



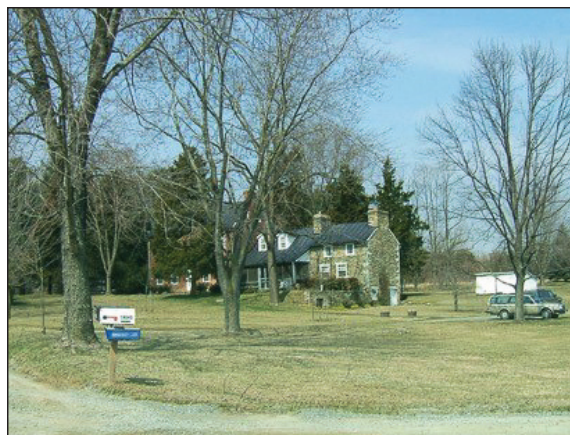
pollinators. At the same time, she selected an area of her yard to simply let grow wild. While she has continued to add new native plants, those original selections have become established and now self-seed to populate new areas. She is even happy to let Milkweeds grow amongst her vegetable plot.

The new habitat has indeed attracted a variety of new critters, and Janet's own interests have broadened. A great benefit to developing habitat that is beneficial for one group of species, such as butterflies, is also beneficial to others, such as native bees, and in turn to the birds that need caterpillars and grubs to raise their chicks. Last year Janet raised and released over 150 Monarchs, all fed and raised on Milkweed from her property. Now, she is increasingly interested in the native bees that are also coming to the pollinator plants. She has seen bumble bees, carpenter bees, digger wasps, and clearwing moths to name a few. She has a healthy population of birds, including Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Cardinals, Chipping Sparrows, White-breasted Nuthatches, Eastern Bluebirds, Northern Mockingbirds, Gray Catbirds, Eastern Phoebe, and Chimney Swifts.

Janet's advice is to try to not do too much and become overwhelmed - pick your battles! She plans to continue to reduce the amount of lawn on the property and wants to do more with sedges and native grasses. At the same time, she is adding shrubs to provide more habitat variety and is also moving some oak seedlings in the hope of encouraging new trees. It's all a learning process.

Janet says that the biggest challenge is to find as much time as she would like to spend on her wildlife habitat, but the first thing that she likes to do when she gets home from her commute is to grab her binoculars or camera and head out to the wild area. Where it was previously quiet, there is now continuous activity and that is a great source of pleasure and relaxation.

If you would like to find out more about providing habitat for wildlife on your own property and the Audubon at Home program, please contact Ann Garvey at agarvey@loudounwildlife.org for more information.



The property – before
habitat gardens
Photo by Janet Locklear



The property – after wildlife
gardens established
Photo by Janet Locklear



Bumblebee doing its job pollinating
Photo by Janet Locklear



Native bee having a feast
Photo by Janet Locklear

Nooks and Crannies - A Place for Families

This sweet feature is written by and for youth and families and aims to spotlight the special perspective of our young nature stewards with an eye for things unseen, residing in the Nooks and Crannies of our environment. This month, our young contributors are Caroline Aho's 5th graders at Buffalo Trail Elementary School in Aldie.

Animal Track Detectives! *by Zaina Nasim, Celina Price, and Glana Tan*

Spring is here, and you might be seeing signs of spring animal movement. Did you know you can learn how to discover and identify tracks to find out who your wildlife neighbors are? To start with, try looking around places where animals get their drinking water, like streams, creeks, rivers, ponds, lakes, and even wet ground or soft mud. You can learn many things about your critter neighbors from looking at the tracks they leave behind, like how many legs they walk on, if they're herbivores (plant eaters) or carnivores (meat eaters), as well as their size and speed. Study the size of the print, number of toes, nail prints, and look for opposable toe prints. Is it a hooved animal? Are the front and rear prints the same size? Look at track patterns, too: is it an animal that hops, gallops, paces? Is there a tail print? Lastly, compare your findings and details to information in a field guide in print or online. Also, preserving animal tracks with plaster can be a fun way to ID a print. One common example in our area are red fox tracks. They are about 2 ¼ inches wide and have four toes with one claw per paw. Keep your eyes open for all the clues that can help you discover animal tracks!



Hike Beaverdam Reservoir in Ashburn while it is currently drained, and you may find excellent track samples like these.

Who left these tracks behind?

Photo by Sarah Steadman

Footprints

by Abigail Muller

When I look outside,
I see animal tracks small and wide
Some are big, some are small
Some look like they belong to an animal that's tall
Some have many toes
Some may go as fast
Some may go as slow
Some may purr and
Some may howl
But they all have something they share
Our wildlife neighbors leave a footprint,
or maybe a pair

Tracks

by Kate Kilgariff

Take photos
Research the print
Ask questions
Clues are everywhere
Know the answer
See the evidence





Eastern Tent Caterpillar

Malacosoma americana

by Emily Bzdyk

As a child and budding entomologist, I often collected caterpillars to raise to adulthood. One of the most readily discovered and easy to rear was the eastern tent caterpillar, *Malacosoma americana*. In the spring, you may notice their conspicuous white tents as they appear on trees. The caterpillars construct these shelters to protect themselves. Many people worry that these tents signal doom for a favorite grove of fruit trees, but usually the trees can withstand the damage, even after repeated years of colonization. These caterpillars are native insects which have a place in our local ecosystem.

There are several caterpillars which create tents and/or resemble the eastern tent caterpillar. The eastern tent caterpillar has a solid white line running down its back along with blue, black and orange markings along the sides. The head is black, and the body is covered in small light-colored hairs. A similar species, the forest tent caterpillar, *Malacosoma disstria*, has a very similar appearance with similar coloring, but the forest tent caterpillar has white footprint-shaped markings along its back. It also doesn't build tents; instead it creates silken sheets to congregate on during molting. The fall webworm, *Hyphantria cunea*, appears in the late summer and is a pale yellow caterpillar with black markings. It creates tents and feeds on hardwoods including elms, hickory, pecan, walnut, maple and some fruit trees.

Eastern tent caterpillars hatch from their egg masses in the spring when tree leaves begin to appear. They are gregarious, and they live together in large groups in their tents, expanding them as they grow. They remain in the tent during the day to shelter from heat and predators, and emerge at night to feed on the leaves of the tree. They prefer cherry and apple species as hosts, but can be found on other trees. The fully grown caterpillars reach about 2 inches in length after 4-6 weeks of feeding, then they leave the tents to wander and look for a protected place to pupate. This is when many people notice the caterpillars walking across paths and roads. The caterpillars I reared as a child escaped from their enclosure (as often seemed to happen) and chose locations all over my bedroom to pupate, above doorways and along trim. Once a caterpillar finds a suitable place, it spins a pale cream-colored cocoon and spends about 3 weeks transforming inside. The adult moth is light brown with lighter whitish bands on its forewings. They fly from May until June, during which time they find a mate and the female lays a silvery brown-colored mass of 150-400 eggs on a tree branch. The eggs then overwinter.

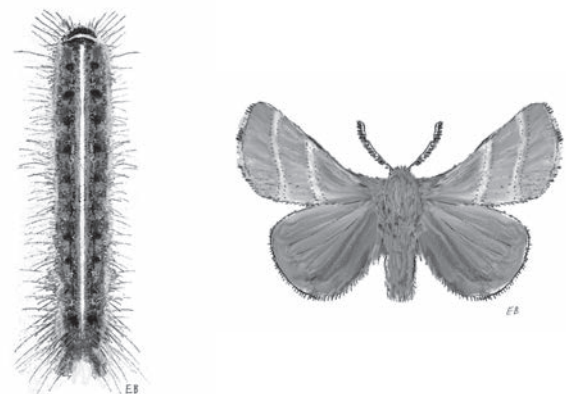


Eastern Tent Caterpillar
Photo by Emily Bzdyk

Though the damage to a tree can appear extensive, it's rare for the caterpillars to do any lasting harm. The trees are weakened by defoliation, especially by a large numbers of caterpillars. However, they can recover by putting out new leaves, often in the same growing season, and the tree can usually handle even 2-3 years of repeated defoliation. Nevertheless, the caterpillars can be removed from trees by simply knocking down or opening the tents with a stick, exposing them to natural predators such as birds. If you find an egg mass, you can also remove it in the winter or early spring, before the caterpillars hatch. Eastern tent caterpillars also have many natural enemies which control their numbers. Predators such as birds, rodents and insects feed on the caterpillars and they are parasitized by various wasp species. Diseases and temperature fluctuations also regulate their populations. These caterpillars can be safely handled by adults and children alike, and are especially accessible when large numbers of fully-grown caterpillars are found searching for a pupation site. This can provide an excellent interaction and teaching experience. These native insects have a role in our local ecosystem and pose no serious threat to our trees in a healthy environment.

Resources

- https://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/pest_al/etc/etc.htm
- <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/environmental/alikes.htm>
- <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef423>
- <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7111.html>
- <http://bugguide.net/node/view/558>



Eastern Tent Caterpillar stages
Illustrations by Emily Bzdyk



Programs and Field Trips }

Space is limited for many of these programs and field trips. Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot. For up-to-date information on our programs and to sign up, visit our website at www.loudounwildlife.org.

Unless otherwise specified, contact info@loudounwildlife.org with questions.

Spring Wildflowers — Sunday, April 9, and Saturday, April 15, 10 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Balls Bluff. Due to overwhelming popularity, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has scheduled two wildflower walks at Balls Bluff in Leesburg. Local naturalists Bill Cour will lead the walk on April 9 and John DeMary on April 15. We will explore this beautiful, wooded riverside park to view the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Potomac River Valley. We will also watch for early migrating birds. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival — Saturday, April 22, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., and Sunday, April 23, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Celebrate Earth Day weekend by participating in this vibrant outdoor festival. Visit Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's booth to check out our hands-on nature display, gather ideas for outdoor fun and volunteer service, and pick up helpful resources that detail how you can add beauty and interest to your garden while providing habitat for birds, butterflies, and other local wildlife. For more information about the event, visit www.flowerandgarden.org. **Questions: Contact Kelly Senser at ksenser@loudounwildlife.org.**



Birding the Blue Ridge Center

Join us on the monthly bird walk at the **Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCS)**, a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. The property includes diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams, and heavily forested slopes. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCS is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brce.org. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Fourth Saturdays: April 22, May 27, and June 24 at 8:00 a.m.

Monarchs, Mexico, and a Messenger of Hope — Sunday, May 7, 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Location TBA. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy hosts Canada's Monarch conservationist and author, Carol Pasternak, for this special presentation and book signing for all ages. See more of this author's amazing adventures in Monarch conservation at <http://monarchcrusader.com/about-me/>.

Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! — To celebrate International Migratory Bird Day and the spectacle of spring migration, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsors a series of walks (all start at 8:00 a.m. unless otherwise noted) in many of Loudoun's birdiest locations. Join us for one or more of the following walks. Registration is required for all but Banshee Reeks: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Horsepen Preserve — Saturday, April 29. Join Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson on a search for birds at the privately owned and heavily forested Horsepen Preserve, a large, natural area that borders the Potomac River immediately to the west of Algonkian Park. The rich bottomland and extensive wetlands that comprise this 370-acre preserve are home to numerous species of birds.

Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project — Wednesday, May 3, 7:00 a.m. Join Joe Coleman and Mary Ann Good for a bird walk at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands. Built in the early 1990's to replace the wetlands lost when the Dulles Greenway was built, this highly successful wetlands along the Goose Creek near Oatlands is a great place to observe a wide variety of birds including small sparrows with their cryptic plumage, stately wading birds, and a magnificent pair of Bald Eagles who have successfully nested there for almost a decade. Waterproof footgear, long pants, and insect repellent are advised.

Goodstone Inn — Saturday, May 6. Join Mary Ann Good and Linda Millington for a bird walk at this private country estate in western Loudoun County. Goodstone has trails along the Goose Creek and in surrounding fields and old woods just a couple miles north of Middleburg. Meet at the lower parking lot of the Inn.

Camp Highroad — Wednesday, May 10. Join Christine Perdue and Linda Millington at Camp Highroad in southwestern Loudoun. The camp has extensive fields, rich woodlands, and deep ravines through which the North Fork Goose Creek and its many tributaries flow. In the spring it is home to a number of nesting birds as well as many migrants.

Banshee Reeks — Saturday, May 13. Join Del Sargent and Dori Rhodes at Banshee Reeks which was established as a nature preserve in 1999. In addition to a mile of Goose Creek frontage, Banshee has a great diversity of habitats on its 725 acres ranging from wetlands and ponds to mixed hardwood forests of oak and hickory to wonderful meadows laden with milkweed, goldenrod and thistle. Numerous trails wind their way through these various habitats and are great for birding.



Claude Moore during the Birdiest Time of the Year: Meet Your Birds! — Saturday, May 13, 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. Join local birders Bill & Della Brown for this special International Migratory Bird Day event just for kids and their parents. We'll make it easy for you! We'll point out the birds as you enjoy a morning stroll along the beautiful trails at Claude Moore Nature Center. See and hear the birds that travel through our area during this special time of spring migration. Space is limited to 12 children, ages 8+, with accompanying adult(s); please register early. No strollers or pets. Scouts welcome. Meet at the parking lot of the Nature Center (not the Recreational Center).

Algonkian Regional Park — Sunday, May 14, 8:00 a.m. Join Larry Meade for a visit to the varied habitats in this regional park which borders the Potomac River in eastern Loudoun County and includes extensive bottomland forest and numerous wetlands.

Milkweed Plant Sale — Saturday, May 13, 9:00 a.m. – Noon. We will have 1,000+ Common Milkweed plants for sale by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and a variety of other native nectar plants offered by Watermark Woods Native Nursery so you can create your Monarch waystation and welcome back the Monarch butterflies this summer! Your purchase of milkweed plants helps us make donations of plants to our local schools, enabling them to create Monarch waystations at schools and share the magic of Monarchs with students. We have already helped 46 schools — we have 40 more to go. Come get your milkweed! Address for the plant sale: Northwest Federal Credit Union, 525 Trimble Plaza, SE, Leesburg, VA.



Dulles Greenway Drive for Charity — Thursday, May 18, All Day! On Thursday, May 18, paying the toll on the Dulles Greenway has a special meaning for local charities. This, the 11th annual Drive for Charity, raises thousands of dollars that go directly into the local community. Each year, the money raised has increased and is divided among local charities including:

The March of Dimes, Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Every Citizen Has Opportunity (ECHO), Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Loudoun

Birding Banshee



Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at the **Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve** south of Leesburg. Because of its rich and varied habitat, it is a birding hot spot. Bring binoculars if you have them.
Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Second Saturdays: April 8, May 13, June 10, and July 8 at 8:00 a.m.

Exploring Loudoun Nature Walk Series

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a free nature walk at various locations throughout Loudoun County. The walks will cover a wide variety of topics including native woodlands, wetlands, birds, seasonal changes, as well as a variety of other topics. Check our website for more details. If you own binoculars, please bring them.

Registration required: Sign Up Online.



First Sundays: May 7, June 4, and July 2 at 8:00 a.m.

Free Clinic and Fresh Air/Full Care. This one-day event makes a huge difference for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, enabling us to provide our many programs and projects throughout the year. Our thanks go to the Dulles Greenway for this great event and to all of you who choose to drive the Greenway on this special day.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 21st Annual Meeting — Sunday, May 21, 4:00 – 7:00 p.m., Ida Lee Park. Each year Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's annual meeting provides an opportunity for members to gather, celebrate another year of accomplishments, and hear an interesting guest speaker. This year we are excited to have T'ai Roulston, curator of the State Arboretum of Virginia and a research associate professor in the Environmental Sciences Department at the University of Virginia. T'ai will be presenting a program called "Understanding, appreciating, and conserving Virginia's wild bees." While the European honey bee is the best known of our pollinators, there are nearly 1,000 species of bees in the eastern United States, many of which play an important role in pollinating crops, gardens, and the wild plants that delight us and support our animal populations. His talk will describe the life history of some of the most prominent of our wild bee species, the roles they play, and the threats they face in the modern landscape.

In addition, author Maria Gianferrari will be on hand to provide a short family program on coyotes and discuss her new book, *Coyote Moon*. Book sales and signing will be available at the event. If you're not yet a member or need to renew, please do! We really need you as a current member. The annual meeting also includes light refreshments; award presentations to science fair winners, Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalists, and our volunteer of the year; and a short business meeting. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**



“We’re Going WILD” Youth & Family Nature Walk Series: Nighttime Discoveries — Friday, June 2, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m., Morven Park. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and local naturalist Brian Balik to explore the natural world through the wonder-filled eyes of children! This series of family nature walks invites families to explore the wide world of nature together, led by an expert in nature and fun! This month’s walk will explore the sights and sounds of habitats and wildlife at NIGHT! Headlamps and flashlights will illuminate the path as we walk the trail from sunset into early nighttime, just as local wildlife initiate their evening routines. Space is limited to 15 children, ages 6+, with accompanying adult(s). No strollers or pets, please. Scouts are welcome. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Wildlife Rehabilitators — Thursday, June 15, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., Location TBD. There are no wildlife rehabilitators in Loudoun County! Successful care and release of sick, injured, and orphaned wild animals requires specific skills and knowledge, as well as legal permits and licenses. If you’re interested in finding out what it takes to become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a conversation with experienced rehabilitators. We’ll talk about the VDGIF permitting process, finding a sponsor, working with a veterinarian, training options, caging and treatment area setup, the time commitment throughout the year, and potential volunteer opportunities. We’ll give you the information you need to make a decision about entering this challenging vocation and a roadmap to get you started. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Dragonflies and Damselflies at Bles Park — Sunday, June 25, 10:00 a.m. Loudoun County is home to over 70 species of dragonflies and damselflies. One of the best places to find them is at Bles Park in Ashburn. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy’s Andy Rabin on a 2- to 3-hour walk around the park in search of these fascinating insects and

get to see them up close. This popular trip is always both fun and informative. Bring binoculars and your own insect net if you have one (some nets will be provided). Adults and interested children are welcome. **Limit 15 participants. Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Full Moon Nature Walk — Saturday, July 8, 8:30 p.m., Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. Have you ever wanted to discover nature under the magical glow of the full moon? This is your chance to enjoy the peace and serenity of the environment around BRCEs and experience what the animals that live in the area see at night. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a full moon hike and see firsthand how animals and insects thrive at night. This will be a relatively easy walk during which we will explore any interesting sights and sounds we find along the trail. We will enjoy a beautiful time to be out of doors in this magnificent setting. Directions can be found at www.brces.org. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

We’re Going WILD Family Nature Walk: Insect Safari! — Sunday, July 16, 9:00 – 10:30 a.m., Algonkian Regional Park. WHAT IS THAT BUG? This walk will explore discoveries in the micro-world of insects at one of their busiest times of day! Local entomologist Ed Clark of the USDA will lead a hands-on investigation into the secret lives of insects that flit, buzz, and crawl about in summer. Come dressed for an outdoor adventure. Space is limited to 20 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult(s). NOTE: no strollers or pets. Scouts welcome. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

For up-to-date information on our programs and to sign up, visit our web site at www.loudounwildlife.org.

JOIN US AS WE MARCH FOR SCIENCE ON EARTH DAY, APRIL 22



Let our legislators know that we need science-based policies and research to tackle the problems and issues that our environment faces today.

Email contact@loudounwildlife.org or 703-777-2575.

Check our website and Facebook for more information.

SPRING THE SEASON FULL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES HAS SPRUNG!



Warm smiles to greet visitors and helping hands to make light work of set-up and clean-up are sought. Join the team of outreach volunteers who make our milkweed sales and participation in local festivals so successful. Interested? (Hooray!) Please contact Kelly Senser, Volunteer Coordination and Outreach Specialist, at ksenser@loudounwildlife.org or 703-777-2575.



Painted Turtles by Lauren White

Painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*) are the most widely-distributed native turtles in North America with a range that encompasses Atlantic to Pacific and southern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. The species is, in fact, comprised of several sub-species with distinct traits, and sometimes overlapping geographic ranges. In northern Virginia, you are most likely to encounter the Eastern painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*), but there is overlap in range with the Midland subspecies (*Chrysemys picta marginata*) west and north of Virginia in Ohio, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Both the Eastern and Midland painted turtle are similar in appearance: they are smaller in size, on average measuring 4.5 - 6 inches in length, and have distinctive yellow and red markings on the neck, legs, and sometimes the edge of the carapace which is the upper shell. The bottom of the shell called the plastron is yellow and untinged.

Painted turtles live in slow-moving bodies of fresh or brackish water including ponds, marshes, swamps, and streams and are easiest to spot when they are basking on rocks, logs, or banks. They are omnivorous and feed on aquatic vegetation as well as insects, crustaceans, mollusks and sometimes even fish. Because they are ectothermic (commonly known as cold-blooded), turtles cannot regulate their body temperature and must rely on external sources to regulate their body heat. Basking in a warm spot is an important way for them to regulate their body temperature so they can more effectively swim and forage for food. They are generally most active in the warmer months from March to October. During the winter months, painted turtles may burrow into mud underwater and enter torpor, a state of short-term hibernation where their metabolism slows or stops. This has inspired a great deal of research into the mechanisms that allow them to survive under such conditions.

Painted turtles are sexually dimorphic meaning that the two sexes exhibit different characteristics beyond the differences in their sexual

organs such as differences in size, color, and markings. Female painted turtles reach a larger body size than males and males can also be distinguished by their longer claws. Mating takes place in the spring, and females come to dry land to create a burrow and lay their eggs. Turtles may also range more broadly to seek new habitat or move between different bodies of water. Although considered a species of least concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), habitat destruction and automobile mortality pose some of the greatest threats to painted turtles. If you see a painted turtle crossing the road, make sure you help it get to the side to which it was heading. However, be sure that the turtle you are assisting is not the painted turtle's larger cousin, the snapping turtle, which can be very aggressive!

Resources

- <http://srelherp.uga.edu/turtles/chrpict.htm>
- http://www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/reptiles/turtles/eastern-painted-turtle/eastern_painted_turtle.php
- http://dnr2.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/plants_wildlife/herps/Testudines.aspx?TurtlesName=Eastern%20Painted%20Turtle
- https://academics.skidmore.edu/wikis/NorthWoods/index.php/Chrysemys_picta_-_Painted_Turtle
- The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles & Amphibians (Knopf 1979)
- Peterson Field Guides: Reptiles and Amphibians: Eastern/Central North America (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 4th ed. 2016)



Baby Painted Turtle
Photo by Sharon Plummer

LOUDOUN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY'S 22ND ANNUAL MEETING

DATE: Sunday, May 21, 2017

TIME: 4:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Ida Lee Recreation Center
60 Ida Lee Drive, NW, Leesburg, VA 20176

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: T'ai Roulston of the State
Arboretum of Virginia, speaking about bees.

Maria Gianferrari, author of the book *Coyote Moon*, will also be doing a short presentation for kids/families. In addition, there will be a short business meeting and light refreshments.

MILKWEED PLANT SALE

DATE: Saturday, May 13, 2017

TIME: 9:00 a.m. – noon

LOCATION: Northwest Federal Credit Union,
525 Trimble Plaza, SE, Leesburg, VA

Your purchase of milkweed plants helps us make donations of plants to our local schools, enabling them to create Monarch waystations at schools and share the magic of Monarchs with students.

COME GET YOUR MILKWEED!



*People and Wildlife
Living in Harmony*

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
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Leesburg, VA 20177

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